

Education within Spiritist Groups in Paris, France

An Honors Thesis (HONR 499)

by

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Abstract

This work covers the Brazilian-import, Spiritist movement in Paris, France. In particular the work examines the educational structures in two centers, L'Association Parisienne des Études Spirite and Centre des Études d'Allen Kardec. Within these two centers, two different structures serve the same role of homogenizing beliefs while allowing for heterogenizing importation.

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Chapter I: Literature Review

Section 1: Introduction

Academics have hardly covered Spiritist movements, let alone those in Paris where there are, by Aubrée's estimate, scarcely 5000 adherents. Those who do focus on its inception and codification to the detriment its current practice. Only Aubrée's work, "La nouvelle dynamique du spiritisme kardeciste" (New Impetus for Kardecist Spiritism), covers contemporary French Spiritism. Even it ends in the late eighties and early nineties. Works on Spiritist history should be mentioned, however, as they help place the current trends within their proper context. There are three of these works: two in English and a third, by Aubrée, in French.

This paper will first acknowledge these historical works, then look specifically at Aubrée's article, and finish by placing this study within the extant body of literature, noting the additions it will provide. Before beginning, one must acknowledge that various scholars have done and are doing research on Kardecist Spiritism, but focus on either the practice in Brazil and its relationship to other spiritist sects there or look at the psychological phenomenon of mediumship. Here, there is only a description and discussion of the beliefs and practices, particularly the education systems, of Parisian Spiritists which negates the need to review these other works.

Section II: Historical Works

Beginning with historical research seems most logical, because it is most plentiful and chronologically makes sense. Two English works, *Secular Spirituality* by Sharp and *Laboratories of Faith* by Monroe, both cover the naissance of the French Spiritist movement in Lyons and its subsequent flourishing in Paris under Allen Kardec and then, after his death, other leaders. But, Sharp's work is far inferior to that of Monroe. They badly cite the material, especially in terms of primary documentation, and lacks a clear methods describing how they went about gathering the data they present. By contrast, Monroe clearly states they spent some years in Paris in the archives of the

Librairie Leymarie, a bookstore that once published the *Revue Spirite* during the Spiritist movement's heyday. Now, it contains the majority of the letters and other documentation relating to the rise and fall of Spiritism in France during the mid-19th to early 20th centuries. Therefore, while both authors' accounting of events differ little, Monroe offers a far more thorough work on the time.

Aubrée wrote the third work on historical Spiritism, *La Table, le Livre, et les Esprits*. Theirs not only covers the history, but relates that history to the Brazilian kardecist movement of the nineties. This becomes particularly helpful when one thinks that the current French Spiritist movement is that of Brazilians returning the belief to its land of birth rather than a continuous line from the mid-19th century to the present. Aside from these three, no further works are known by the author.

Section III: Modern Research

The only readily available research done on contemporary French Spiritism is Aubrée's aforementioned article. Aubrée's work overviews various groups and organizations within French Spiritism at the time of their writing. They mention l'Union scientifique francophone pour l'investigation psychique et l'étude de la survivance (USFIPES), la Société d'études psychiques de Paris (SEPP), and l'Union spirite française et francophone (USFF). All are regional and national groups comprised of smaller centers and groups throughout France. Also they mention le Centre des études d'Allen Kardec (CESAK) which is one of two groups studied in this paper.

Section IV: Importance of This Study

However, in the last fifteen years new groups: nationally, regionally, and locally, have formed like l'Institut de recherche sur les expériences spirites (INREES). Furthermore, other types of groups go unmentioned such as study groups and "spirit hospitals" which focus on educating both the living and the deceased. Aubrée notes the importance of education in Spiritist groups, saying that superior spirits, those bearing moral and philosophical messages, only speak to those mediums, "best prepared" (pp. 593). Also, they divide Kardecist spiritist aims in three parts with the third giving adherents "a

mission to teach the inferior spirits which can present themselves", but do not describe how one goes about that teaching or, more importantly how one goes about preparing a medium. That is the aim of this paper, to provide a phenomenological description of the education of the incarnated and disincarnated as well as the formation of mediums within the Parisian Spiritist groups of CESAK and APES (L'Association parisienne des études spirites).

Chapter II: Methodology

Section I: Introduction

Resulting from three months of field study, this paper examines the education of mediums and visitors at two Parisian Brazilian-Spiritist centers. Both centers were founded by Brazilian immigrants to Paris, the Centre des Etudes d'Allen Kardec (CESAK) preceding L'Association Parisienne des Etudes Spiritistes (APES). APES's founder attended CESAK when they first arrived to France in the eighties. Research sites were not chosen on the basis of this connection but based on convenience of regular, weekly meeting times and their openness to visitors.

Prior to visiting the site, emails were sent to ask about whether a researcher could attend their gatherings. During the first visit, introductions were made and the ability to record and interview attendees with their permission discussed. At APES, the founder arranged for a meeting between myself and the center's executive members. They also asked to look over release forms and the project overview I had provided them. During this initial meeting, terminology regarding Spiritist mediumship was clarified and some basic outlines of modern-day Spiritism offered.

At CESAK, the founder offered ground rules of no recording seances and for the researcher to announce her presence and intention to record at all meetings. Also, permission and consent had to be requested from all members in attendance while recording. Members of CESAK who held a separate group invited the researcher to come to but not to record their meeting. While in Paris, I also visited sources outside of the centers like Parapsy, a convention of diviners, and Allen Kardec Day, a convention of Parisian Spiritist groups, as well as interviewed an individual from a separate Spiritism tradition.

In this study, three different sources were employed: primary source readings, participant observation, and interviews. These will be discussed separately in the following pages. All data was recorded either in my field notes during or directly following meetings and/or on an audio recorder.

Recorded interviews were later transcribed while lectures and other audio were left in raw form.

Section II: Readings

While attending the lectures and book readings, speakers often referenced texts such as Le Livre des Esprits, L'Evangile selon le Spiritisme (henceforth referred to simply as L'Evangile), and various psychographies (writings received from the spirits and written by mediums) from authors like Chico Xavier; therefore a certain degree of background reading was necessary. Before arriving in the field, Le Livre des Esprits was read. After arriving, individuals at APES suggested the reading of two introductory texts, Kardec's Spiritisme à sa Expression plus Simple et Ponsardinès Comprendre le Spiritisme. In addition, the first trimonthly of Inexploré, INREES's periodical, was read for context into the state of spiritualist concepts in France. Also, at Allen Kardec Day, a periodical, *Vignes de Lumières*, was circulated by the event's host, Le Conseil Spirite Française was also consulted. Reading these primary source documents helped set the stage for field interviews and participant observations.

Aside from personal readings, group readings were also done at all CESAK meetings. Throughout the time there, CESAK members and attendees read and discussed several chapters of L'Evangile. APES holds a similar reading of psychographies once monthly, but scheduling allowed for only a single visit,. From these readings, a general framework of Spiritist doctrine was formed which aided in comprehending the process of teaching it and helped the researcher to meaningfully participate in Spiritist literature discussions.

Section III: Participant Observation

Participant observation formed the backbone of the research being discussed here and helped direct interviews, resulting in better data saturation regarding this thesis' area of study. Participant-observation sites were APES's and CESAK's weekly meetings and le passe, an event where a medium removes disturbances from an attendee's perispirt (similar to an aura); a séance at CESAK; the monthly meetings of APES, Allen Kardec Day; and Parapsy. At each event notes on participant behavior,

speaker behavior, presentation style, presentation content. This lay the groundwork for future interview questions. Each event had its own format requiring different kinds and degrees of participation e.g. lectures at APES requiring no direct participation or readings at CESAK requiring reading and discussion input from the researcher.

Weekly meetings at APES consisted of a lecture by a single speaker in front of forty to fifty audience members on a subject of personal interest. There the researcher needed only sit and listen while making notes on the presentation, on the questions it raised, and on the sparse commentary from the audience. After the presentations, a small social time was called which allowed for informal introductions and conversation as well as requests for future interviews.

Monthly meetings at APES were formatted two ways: one as a question and answer session led by a medium of the center, the other as a book study with reading and analysis. Both allowed for greater audience participation, thanks to these being small groups of eight or nine. Therefore, in these meetings one could raise questions and listen to others' questions be answered.

General questions on Spiritist thought were raised at the question and answer meetings as they were open to the public. Often, curious individuals who had attended a lecture would then attend the session to have questions they had developed during the previous lecture answered.

At the book readings, questions from the audience were more particular and pertained to specific details of Spiritist thought. Only members of APES who had been regularly attending the center for more than a year could attend the study. Therefore the audience comprised of only those active in the center and interested in furthering their understanding. As a researcher, I was allowed special permission to attend by the study's organizer.

CESAK's meetings were weekly, one being led by the founder and the other by her students. In both meetings, a participant would read from L'Evangile followed by an analysis of the text by the group much like a Christian Bible study. At these sessions, the researcher mainly asked for informants to clarify and elaborate on Spiritist doctrine. Towards the end of the study, after Allen Kardec Day, the

founder's meeting began to take on a new format with one person doing the reading and a primary analysis of the text beforehand which led to discussion among the other twenty or so attendees. At the students' meeting, recording was prohibited, but extensive field notes were taken during the meeting.

Besides these weekly and monthly meetings, two other participant-observation events were Allen Kardec Day and Parapsy. Allen Kardec Day was organized by Le Conseil Spirite Française, one of a few Spiritist national groups. An invitation for attendance was offered by both the founder of CESAK and the founder of APES. APES, CESAK, and l'Association Spirite Internationale de Thérèse d'Avila (ASITA) attended to present on Spiritist concepts and historical figures. Also, at Allen Kardec Day, a short exchange was had with the head of Le Conseil Spirite Française.

Also attended was Parapsy, a three day event, was attended for a day to help provide some understanding of how the Spiritist movement links to other French parapsychological and spiritualistic traditions and movements. This conference brought together for lectures vendors and practitioners of fields like aromatherapy; magnetism; tarot reading; and even a person selling wine, "Astrovin", made for a particular astrological sign. A hall seating about one hundred and fifty was the venue for the three day event throughout which speakers alternated. Aside from a single incident where a crowd member began questioning the speaker, Spiritism was never mentioned.

Section IV: Interviews

Interview protocol included a release form outlining the project goals and the intention to replace actual informant names with pseudonyms. All interviews were semi-formal so as to elucidate central facets of Spiritism. These questions were, "How is Spiritism affected by being in France?", "Can one ever prove Spiritism and spirit communication?", "What is Spiritism's relationship to faith, science, and philosophy?", and "How did you find Spiritism?". These general questions often led to more specific issues and to a host of secondary topics such as the organizational structure of the centers, educating individuals about the Spirit Doctrine, the phenomenon of mediumship, and the

process of learning the Spirit Doctrine. Interviews ran from fifteen minutes to two hours. Locations for interviews included outside, an informant's residence, the centers themselves, a cafés, and restaurants. If the interview were at a café or restaurant, the expense of their coffee or meal was covered. No further compensation was offered to any informants.

Sampling methodology strove to mimic the intellectual format of the centers (and traditions) themselves. APES members are divided into new-entrant, member, medium-in-training, medium, and full member categories. Each category has its own roles and responsibilities required which differ according to length and size of contribution to the center. Contribution here means extent of commitment to learning about the Spirit Doctrine and volunteering to assist the center e.g. bringing refreshments for the social hour. Mediums-in-training and mediums also took part in the APES center séances to learn how to be a better medium as well as to receive instruction from the Spirit Plane. Each of these levels was represented in the interview cycle with an additional full member and medium providing additional details on the education process, bringing the total number of APES informants to six.

At CESAK, the organizational structure is less complex with the only difference between members and non-member is that non-members could not attend séances. One non-member, one member, and the founder were interviewed here. In addition to these recorded interviews, additional conversations occurred which were recorded in field notes soon after. None of these will be quoted here directly but instead provide additional data regarding Spiritism. An additional interviewee came from Le Cercle Spirite Allen Kardec, a group not directly related to CESAK or APES. They use Chateigner's Le Nouveau Livre des Esprits rather than Kardec's Livre des Esprits as their central doctrine. This interview helped place CESAK and APES, this research's primary data collection sites, within the broader Spiritist current in France.

Section V: Limitations

This study is limited to only CESAK and APES informants. No generalizations regarding Spiritists in world or even in France can then be made from this data. Further, even inside this Parisian Brazilian-Spiritist context, differences can exist between centers. So, this paper aims to describe and consider the reasoning and methodology that led to the structures and tradition seen today within these two centers. Furthermore, roughly half of all attendees to both CESAK and APES are Brazilian or Portuguese. However, this sample has only three Brazilian-born informants, the founders themselves and a CESAK attendee, and one Portuguese, a medium from APES. This limits the data collection and the ability to make statements here about differences that could exist between the French, Brazilian, and Portuguese experiences of Spiritist education though informant's implied no large differences exist.

Chapter III: Ethnographic Outline

Section I: History and Background

Before discussing the modern Spiritist education, one must overview the history of this movement. First, this section will highlight the style of Spiritist writing and organization before and now. Then, it will cover the history of CESAK, Center for the Spiritual Studies of Allen Kardec, and APES, Parisian Association of Spiritual Studies. With this done, we can then examine the role of education in Spiritist ontology and what it means to be “educated” in each group.

In regards to literature, it is always written in a distinct, Spiritist style of question and response. One finds this in all Kardec's works. Spiritists reason that Kardec, originally a math teacher, continued to write pedantically in an effort to teach others the messages of the spirits. According to Kardec himself and Spiritists both modern and historical, he traveled across France asking different mediums a set of questions and collected similar responses, resulting in the *Spirits' Book*. In the book, numbers questions and divides them into various sections such as *Nature of the Universe*. The responses there outline the basic tenets of Spiritism. Kardec elucidates the spirits' vague or convoluted responses with explanations directly below the Spirits' response.

After the *Spirits' Book*, Kardec wrote the *Bible According to Spiritism*, from here on referred to as *L'Evangile*, and *Sky and Hell*. In *L'Evangile*, Kardec writes that the Spirits declare the highest example of moral behavior is Jesus Christ. From this, Kardec expounds on how the Bible supports reincarnation and mediumship. Again, the question and answer format in the *Spirits' Book* continues throughout though the questions are not as explicitly laid out as in the *Spirits' Book*. Even modern publications like CSF's (*Conseil Spirite Française*) newsletter report answers to questions posed to the Spirits. The CSF' newsletter presents questions beyond those asked in Kardec's work, which differs from other works in the post-Kardec literature. Only one other work, *The New Spirits' Book*, offers fresh material from the spirits. However, only one strand of Spiritism uses *The New Spirits' Book*.

Further, *The New Spirits' Book* has been received with skepticism by other centers since it consists of only one medium's, Katrine Chateigner, experience in 2003. A person from CSF said that they, adherents of *The New Spirits' Book*, have their beliefs while members of CSF had theirs. Both still acknowledge the other as following Spiritism though in different ways. On the other hand, thanks to Brazilians returning Spiritism to Paris, Brazilian psychographies have been received into Parisian Spiritist circles. These psychographies also come from single mediums, though they claim to channel a single spirit's experiences rather than receive answers to specific questions.

These works clarify the world of the spirits. Parisian Spiritists argued Kardec explained the system of the spirits, but did not detail all of its elements. Psychographies concern themselves with these details by following the story of a single spirit as it returns to the spirit plane, and begins studying to eventually reincarnate. Usually, these are suffering spirits telling how they escaped their pain and the grandeur of the spirit plane they entered after that escape. Informants accept psychographies as legitimate based on whether they dovetail with Kardec's work and the morality these psychographers exemplify. For example, Kardec maintains that different levels of Spirits reside at different vibrations. If a psychographer's account were to contradict that, the Spiritist community would not accept it as legitimate. So not all psychographies are accepted, while only those of Divaldo Franco and Chico Xavier could be called canonized. These psychographers bring new information into Spiritism and are taught in tandem with Kardec's works.

In regards to the centers' history, Anita Becquerel, the founder of APES, once attended CESAK. CESAK was established first in 1976 with Claudia Bonmartin after she came to France from Brazil for professional reasons. Claudia realized that there were no Spiritist organizations in Paris, so she founded CESAK. Later, Anita also came to Paris for professional reasons, but found CESAK too disorganized for her vision. She, and some other students who shared her vision, left CESAK to found APES. Anita and Claudia both described the separation as pleasant, and simply reflect differences in vision. Claudia said that her students have left at other times to found their own centers. She encourages it since it

13

helps spread the Spiritist message and lets the students, and their students, grow.

Anita, in her time at CESAK seems to have left her mark. In their séance room, a laminated paper hung naming and color-coding different levels of membership which closely corresponded with those of APES. Any third-party, such as a national group or other founding member of APES who attended CESAK, could have potentially created or introduced the system. Such an introduction has precedent in my own experience with CESAK. But, no matter how they came to share the same membership structure APES now uses a system of membership that resembles the one shown at CESAK on laminate, while CESAK itself has abandoned it.

Despite a difference of approach, CESAK and APES both pursue spirit hospital work (what this is will be discussed further on). Spirit hospitals seem to be a Brazilian import into French Spiritism. None of the academic histories mention this. Even Aubrée in her recent work omits it. APES has steadfastly retained its independence and organization throughout its existence, throwing doubt on a scenario where APES follows a trend scarcely ten years old. So, I believe spirit hospitals are new to French Spiritism. However, they are old enough in Brazilian Spiritism to be seen as established.

Spirit hospital work teaches the disincarnated rather than the incarnated. CESAK identifies itself as primarily a spirit hospital, existing to help lower spirits develop better morality through education. At both CESAK and APES, the education of disincarnated and incarnated¹ spirits happens simultaneously with disincarnated spirits listening in on the discussions and presentations of the centers.

As a final note, education plays a vital role in Spiritism's public visibility. When Spiritism arose in conversation outside the Spiritist community, French-born people whom I spoke with invariably asked, "The people with the turning tables, no?" Filling the gap between public perception of Spiritism,

¹ In Spiritism, spirits are either incarnated or disincarnated. Spirits which are incarnated have a physical body, whether like ours or of a different vibrational pattern depends on the morality of the Spirit. Disincarnated spirits have no body and either reside in the vibrational plane in which they last incarnated, spirits which are stuck, or return to the Spirit plane to study before incarnating once more.

the “table tournante” of the 19th-century, and the actual beliefs of modern Spiritists, the works of Allen Kardec and Brazilian psychographies, presents a challenge to Spiritists. Spiritists must focus on education not only within their own ranks for theological reasons, but also to attract new members and dispel public misunderstandings about them.

Section II: Spiritist Ontology

Now, that we have outlined Brazilian Spiritism's history in Paris, we can look at the world views comprising Spiritist thought, starting with the organization of the spirit plane, then the implications of this organization has for mediums and presenters.

Kardec organizes the spirits in order of purity and knowledge. He calls the most knowledgeable, and therefore purest, spirits “the good spirits” which include notables such as Plato, Danté, Saint Augustus, and others who have contributed to Western philosophy, science, and humanities. I limit this to Western studies as Kardec never mentions persons like Sun Tzu of whom he would have been aware, though modern spiritists seem to also regard these kinds of non-Westerners as pure spirits. Kardec lists all levels (impure to pure) as follows:

10. Impure Spirits
9. Frivolous Spirits
8. Pseudo-Authorities
7. Ordinary Spirit
6. Noisy and Boisterous Spirits
5. Benevolent Spirits
4. Learned Spirits
3. Wise Spirits
2. High Spirits
1. Pure Spirits

All Spirits above and including benevolent comprise the good spirits. During séances, mediums intend to communicate with these spirits for moral guidance and wisdom. In this way, Spiritism describes itself as a science, in the traditional sense of, "way of knowing". The spirits provide persons on Earth a means by which they can attain a higher sense of moral awareness. However, to attain this awareness, one must understand the workings of the spirit plane and the precepts held there. Spiritist education begins with acceptance of the persistence of life after death by reincarnation.

For Spiritists, suicide represents the extreme rejection of this premise. A spirit cannot accept that life continues for forever and attempts to end their existence by extinguishing their current incarnation. To teach the suicidal spirit, spirits have to remain on Earth until they accept the eternity of life and the futility of any attempt to end one's incarnation. Communication with these stuck spirits also provides a warning to spiritists about the consequences of suicide. After accepting life's persistence, the spirit can continue its growth in future lives. Without it, the spirit would be left to potentially repeat a cycle of incarnation and suicide which means a spirit can never learn from or move past its mistake.

All "punishments" given to spirits are thought to be an opportunity to advance after making a mistake. According to Spiritists, God created this process and the spirits during Biblical creation. Spirits were created ignorant, without a knowledge of right and wrong. But, those who behaved well came to inhabit better places and developed higher thinking, eventually forming the egalitarian spirit plane. Lower planes developed where badly behaved spirits gathered.

Here, divisions occur between spirits, because the rule of might reigns. Spirits subject one another to suffering through their desire to better themselves, unaware that mutual assistance would lead them to higher planes and, therefore, better modes of living. This begins the process by which education begins differentiating spirits. Ignorant spirits do not know how to better themselves, so outside forces, such as mediums in spirit hospitals, must teach these spirits for those spirits to develop.

Perhaps a example of how spirits handle punishment in relation to knowledge can be taken from a passage often quoted by spiritists in *L'Evangile* discussing a séance that Kardec attended. A

famous mass-murderer of Kardec's time possessed the medium. The murderer was happy despite his behavior on Earth. Kardec asked why he was not suffering, to which he replied that he did not know the morality of the Earth at the time, and, therefore, he could not be punished for ignorance.

Spirits might not be able to regress in terms of knowledge but they can in behavior, which results in punishment for wayward spirits². However, punishment is not retribution for damages caused by the spirit. Punishment only exists to reform spirits who failed to learn these lessons. Spirits wrong one another in the false belief that whatever temporary gain they achieve through wrongdoing can outweigh those of long-term spiritual growth. In reality, spirits only reap the pains they sow, attracting spirits of a similar level to themselves. For this reason, most mediums at APES will not be interviewed at places like a café-bar. This is because spirits who have failed to advance often remain at their previous haunts, harassing medium there - attempting to speak through them there. Mediums avoid these lower spirits, known as obsesseurs, whenever possible, unless working in a Spirit Hospital setting. A large part of mediumship training consists of making trainees aware of these lower spirits and the false messages (and dangers) they bring to mediums.

Following Kardec's precedent, discerning false messages from true ones is done mainly by comparison. Spiritists only accept messages which multiple mediums have received. So, after a séance, mediums compare messages with those from past séances for accuracy. An accurate message from the good spirits is one that closely follows the Spirit Doctrine and advocates good morality. Generally Spiritists define good morality as following "the greatest teacher, Jesus Christ" (Le Livre des Esprits Some Page). In particular, Spiritists quote from the Sermon on the Mount. Through awareness of others' suffering, a Spiritist can treat others with respect and kindness, bettering the entire world. This a view led one self-identified Communist informant to say, "All Spiritists are leftists. They want to believe in a better world."

2 Paradoxically, Spiritists argue that spirits fall and struggle through punishment, while ardently defending none regress from one level to another. This represents the only imaginable compromise of the two stances. NOTE JMN elaborate.

The pinnacle of spiritual development, however, occurs not on the incarnated planes, but in the spirit plane. There, a perfect egalitarianism exists, each spirit there works according to their abilities and receives according to their needs. Higher spirits direct the spirit plane, guiding it to cultivate, and advance, as many spirits as possible. Spirit plane technology far surpasses our own as a result of the spirits' superior moral positions. For example, art in spiritist slide-shows illustrated levitating cars. For Spiritists technology and morality advance together. One cannot separate scientific development and moral cultivation in Spiritist thought.

Because theology and science are intertwined, every informant declared that we cannot currently prove, in any empirical sense, the existence of the Spirits. To verify their existence, human persons must rely on the phenomenon of mediumship instead of detection by means of scientific instruments³. However, informants added that after humanity has developed past a certain point such inventions will occur, and with empiricist proof of Spiritism, Spiritist ideas will then spread further resulting in even greater spiritual growth. Further, Spiritists believe that eureka moments come from when higher spirits impress a new idea or concept on someone. One informant said that a medium can at times see the blueprints in the vast libraries of the spirit plane, but the components are so complex that even they are incomprehensible and would be even to specialists. Speaking of the libraries, in the spirit plane, libraries and research institutes exist which contain all knowledge ever collected by any spirit. Presenters at APES showed illustrations of the spirit world, originating from the psychographies, with hovering cars and seemingly impossible architecture.

Spirits are divided into various families which they forget while incarnated to help simplify the difficult process of incarnation. This is why, Spiritists say, babies often look into space and why children retain no memories before the age of three. During this time on earth, the spirit is familiarizing itself the lower vibrations of Earth, in contrast to the higher vibrations of the spirit plane. These

3 . This view is not universal. For example INREES adherents attempt to show spirit faces by shining lasers through smoke as to demonstrate the existence and constant presence of Spirits.

vibrations originate in the spiritual fluid, the parasprit, which surrounds all incarnated persons. This parasprit can be manipulated with magnetizers or the pass. With the pass it is higher spirits' energy which changes the paraspirit, with magnetization, a person can alter this. The pass is taken on by mediums within Spiritism. Spiritists ask for higher spirits to come through them and assist the person receiving the pass. In magnetization, the magnetizer himself channels energy to add to deficiencies in a persons parasprit and siphon off abundances. In both cases, impurities and imbalances in a person's spiritual fluid can be removed or corrected.

These vibrational levels, described in *The Spirits' Book*, correspond with the planets. However, Spiritists disagree as to whether the planets are literal (objects of astronomy) or metaphorical (reflections of these vibrational levels). Informants believing in these planets as things in the world give reasons for why we (and empirical-rationalist science) cannot detect these spirits. Vibrational patterns, Spiritists say, vary from planet to planet; higher vibrational beings exist on Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, and outward; lower vibrational beings on the inner planets: Venus and Mercury; earth is home to generally Ordinary Spirits. In the case of metaphorical planets, differing vibrations exist throughout the Universe. However Spiritists do not argue for parallel universes with each containing separate vibrational entities, as this, they argue, would make the transportation of spirits into a medium's body impossible.

Since these different planets are home to different spirits yet all spirits disincarnate to the spirit plane, questions remain as to the exact nature of incarnation on the planetary planes versus the spirit plane. For example, do spirits of different levels interact there or are they still partitioned off due to vibrational differences? Do spirits decide to incarnate on lower and higher planes based on something beyond their rank? Are these ranks determined by the morality of the spirit in an absolute sense (an Ordinary Spirit is Ordinary in both incarnated and disincarnated) or relative to the planet of incarnation (one incarnation a spirit is Ordinary while the next they become Good or False Savants) The movement of spirits between the two locales, the spirit plane and the planetary planes remains obscure though

discussed in the pycographies, written only in Portugese (which I don't read). Future research should elucidate details.

Pycographies, not Kardec's original works, describe the spirit plane. Still,, Brazilian Spiritists maintain that pycographies accurately represent the spirit plane. When asked how a Spiritist separates true psychography from fraud, one informant responded one must look at the life of the psychographer in question. If that person is living in accordance with the moral principles put forth by the spirits, they can be regarded as legitimate. If not, their work lacks credibility. Further, the psychographer must not contradict other Spiritist work. So, works by Franco and Xavier are accepted because their fine details are supported by Kardec's work.

In the same way, one analyzes mediums' messages. The morality of the medium and the messages' congruence with Spirit Doctrine contribute to the legitimacy of the message. Perhaps this explains why Brazilian Spiritists regard follower of *The New Spirits' Book* with skepticism. It intends to rework Kardec's original concept rather than elaborate on or add to the Spiritist's collective store of knowledge. Also, when one submits to the spirits, discretion must be practiced. Errant spirits, such as those of the faux-savant level, can offer seemingly deep thoughts while providing no real direction, and easily derail a new medium. Since one compares messages to analyze accuracy, mediums need a thorough knowledge of existing literature. Not surprisingly this is the main thrust of Spiritist education.

Spiritists argue that a moral, spiritually well-developed individual naturally attracts spirits of a high standing. A certain degree of difficulty exists in manifesting spirits from lower and higher vibrational planes no matter what. Spirits have difficulties in adjusting between density of matter in different vibrational planes. A spirit incarnating from the lightness of the spirit plane into the viscosity of Earth finds itself adjusting to the change for several years as the spirit adjusts itself from a body of pure energy into a physical body. Therefore, the moral and spiritual vibrate nearer to the good spirits, explaining why such mediums attract higher spirits. Spirit hospitals exist to compensate for the energy

2

required for higher spirits to contact a lower spirit.

As part of some incarnated spirits' life paths (*chemin de vie*), they assist spirits lower than themselves. In this way, spirit guides (*guide spirite*) come to the incarnated. In fact, at some higher levels of the spirit hierarchy, administrators help select these partnerships and, to assist these partnerships, run spirit hospitals in the spirit plane. APES has, for example, a spirit team which is contacted at least once a year to discuss the direction of the center and its needs. CESAK members also spoke of a spirit team although they seem to consult it rarely. When this occurs, it is as part of regular séances not as with APES setting aside a special annual séance for this purpose.

As far as mediumship, mediums described this as opening oneself to the influence of the spirits. Before beginning a séance, the medium prays to attract the spirits required. These could be lower and higher spirits for spirit hospital work, the center's spirit team for guidance, or higher spirits from which to learn. Quoting one informant, "There is a prayer that is made to begin the work. One asks for assistance. Then, we submit and feel." After this the informant continued, "I myself can speak of what I could feel as well as see. There are visions like the movements of color when one closes their eyes." As far as delivering verbal messages, "It is as if something pushes on the throat that wants to be expressed. Not expressed, but something directs the throat [to speak]."

Spirits' coming to a medium can occur voluntarily or not. The first occurs with higher spirits, those glad to teach to those willing to listen, and lower spirits who want to use the medium as a mouthpiece to vent their frustrations and sufferings. Then any medium can discuss this spirit's problems by bringing the spirit into the center to continue their studies with the incarnated spirits.

The latter occurs in spirit hospital work. A spirit team of the center will find spirits in need of specific instruction and bring them into the center. Usually this only occurs during lectures and discussion groups and then the spirit team impresses certain phrases and concepts on the speaker, aiding the team's educational goal.

A higher spirit cannot deliver messages directly on account of the difficulty involved in

lowering or matching their vibrational level to that of the lower spirit. As for this method, only mediums at APES described it. Perhaps because CESAK's meetings lack lecturers, instead having group discussions.

At times, mediums described talking to and seeing these spirits as if they were incarnated entities. One medium put it this way, "[I see them] exactly as I am seeing you." The introduction of new entities throughout the course of a presentation leaves APES lecturers nonplussed as they are conditioned to these random interactions in their day-to-day life. Lecturers ask incarnated persons to remain throughout the entire presentation, or, if they leave, to not return. This, implies that disincarnated spirits can arrive in the middle of the presentation, but the spirit team prevents their departure.

Section III: Centers

Sub-Section A: APES

Now, that we have a functional conception of Spiritist ontology, we can discuss how the centers pass it along, first with APES, then CESAK. APES has its students transverse a rigid series of steps. One begins as a visitor and ends up, if they want, a full-member medium. Each step has its own obligations and privileges. In ascending order, the steps are:

1. Visitor
2. Adherent
3. Medium-in-training
4. Full Membership
5. Teacher/Executive Board

At APES, visitors are welcome to attend the open meetings, i.e., once-weekly lecture and once-monthly Q&A sessions. These lectures begin with a brief explanation of APES's goals, in brief to better persons through Spiritist ideals of charity and fraternity. Then, a presenter will ask that all attendees

remain for the entire presentation, or, if they leave, to not reenter the room lest they disturb the spiritual fluid boundary. After this, the lecturer takes the stage, a small area raised a few inches above the seating area, and begins. In these lectures, a wide variety of topics can be covered depending on the interests of the lecturer who chooses a topic based on their current research in Spiritist literature. Some lecture titles have been: "The Emancipation of the Soul: The Role of The Dream" and "Actions of Higher Spiritual Planes on Our Lives". During the presentation, a lecturer will ask for, but rarely receive, any questions. Sometimes though, an audience member will ask a question without being asked, or make an exclamation; however attendees tend to frown on such behavior.

At the end of the lecture, the MC explains and prepares attendees for the *passee* (le *passee*). Another person then prays, blessing the pass. While attendees move to a small side room lit with red light in groups of four to five to receive the pass, a slide-show runs in the main room, showing a spirit standing behind a medium giving the pass, passages from Spiritist literature, and a description of the pass. Upon entering the side room, an attendee sits in a chair. A medium stands in front of the attendee and makes slow waving gestures as if to wrap negative energy around their hand. Each attendee has one medium do the pass on them. Occasionally, mediums will shake their hands, throwing off the accumulated negativity. When a medium finishes on their attendee, they stand silently in front of them. When all mediums have finished, the four or five attendees leave together through a door leading to a small kitchen where a volunteer offers them fluidified water (*eau fluidifié*) in one ounce cups. The fluidified adjective refers to the spiritual fluid (*fluide spirituelle*) added to the water when the bottles of water sit on the stage in the center's main room for several days, so good spirits can endow the bottles with good spiritual energy.

Before the attendees enter the side room, the mediums say a collective prayer to the spirit team separate from that of the main room, asking for their assistance. Then the mediums take their places in front of a chair. After all attendees receive the pass, the mediums collectively pray a final time in thanks for the spirit team's assistance. After the mediums exit, the MC or Anita tells the audience about books

23

on sale at APES's bookstore, about the food available in the kitchen, and about special upcoming events, for example like a raffle for an old prayer book, or about larger open meetings like Allen Kardec Day. Book and food sales and these small raffles represent the only income of the center aside from donations. Books come in Portuguese and French because of the number of Brazilian and Portuguese attendants as well as some of the psychographies are only available in Portuguese.

A brief social hour follows. During this time, newcomers and regulars talk about their personal lives as well as Spiritist beliefs. Due to my status as a researcher, conversations when I was there were normally about attendees' beliefs. However, attendees also asked about my studies, my time in Paris, and other personal topics. This, I believe, is the first step in the Spiritist educational process. During these conversations, books and personal experiences can be shared, allowing débutantes and novices to Spiritist studies to exchange information. Further, the lecturer always remained to answer any questions the audience may have. All this helped facilitate the feelings of a spiritual fraternity (*fraternité spirite*). Lectures also help newcomers orient themselves to Spiritism tradition and community.

If an attendee expresses an interest in learning more, mediums or adherents first direct them toward the Spiritist literature. In particular, members suggest newcomers read, *Understanding Spiritisme* by Mickael Ponsardin and, *Spiritism in Its Simplest Form* by Allen Kardec. Ponsardin's work is offered for the modernity of the French and its mention of Brazilian psychographers like Chico Xavier. *Spiritism in Its Simplest Form*, not surprisingly, gives Kardec most simplified explanation of Spiritism. These readings begin the novice's independent study which marks the majority of Spiritist education.

Education at this stage focuses almost entirely on Kardec's life and the times in which he lived. Anita herself gives a presentation covering the history of Spiritism and Kardec. Students look at basic biographical information like Kardec beginning with his role as a teacher who wrote an influential math textbook. Also they study other parts of Spiritist history like why Kardec changed his name (he received a message telling him he was a druid in a past life named Kardec), the roots of Spiritism in

spinning tables (*table tournante*), the American Fox Sisters as well as nineteenth century French history focusing on the Fourierists and Comte. APES argues that Kardec was a man of his time and that without understanding the historical, cultural context of his time understanding Spiritism is impossible. During this time, APES expects the student to voluntarily contribute to the center by cooking food, sold during the social hour, serving the fluidified water after the pass, or in other ways suited to their strengths and interests.

Throughout this time, members not only evaluate a students' commitment to their studies but also how they function within the center. As one informant said, a member can be serious and willing to assist, but simply does not work well with the group. In short, one must consider in Spiritist education human relationships in addition to work ethic and commitment. But, the founder stated that finding Spiritists with a strong work ethic was rare, so I wonder the frequency which members reject students for a disagreeable personality.

During this time, APES considers the student to be a member of APES and allows them to participate in the once-monthly book study as well as to have access to APES's library, a collection of every work on Spiritism which the center can find, including scholarly works like that of Aubrée.

After a six month trial membership, signified by the adherent level, a student begins practical training and becomes a medium-in-training. From then on, the student is expected to take part in séances in addition to their previous duties. APES has several different séances including a spirit art gathering (described below), spiritual assistance, assistance for families in mourning, and a general séances. Students rotate through these each month to familiarize them with the workings of all facets of the center's activities. One person at the center coordinates all students activities: he professes to have no mediumnistic ability and only contributes to the spirit art sessions.

Each séance contacts a different set of spirits for a different reasons. For example, at the spirit art gatherings, mediums sit at a table with art supplies and paper at the center. Here, one attempts to communicate with the good spirits allowing them to transmit lessons through artwork. Usually, these

2

drawings have a heart or flower with a phrase around it or a person with an aura glowing around them. These phrases are often optimistic and stress how much groups like these can accomplish much through cooperation. At spiritual assistance meetings, mediums draw in lower spirits to offer consolation and direction. I have no knowledge of what occurs at the spiritual assistance for families in mourning except for one informant's interview. He described the séance as much like a book discussion. All involved study from a given book, like *Heaven and Earth (Le Ciel et L'Enfers)*, and discuss its meaning both in general and as it relates to the attendees' difficulties. Afterward, the mediums in charge of the group meet behind closed doors to receive messages from the spirits to aid the mourners. Mediums do not seek messages from the individual persons whom the families mourn but rather look to the spirits to console all these who are in attendance. Messages are read aloud in the main meeting room after the closed door séance. APES never allows non-mediums (whether in training or otherwise) to attend these séances.

Finally, there are the general séances where mediums contact good spirits looking for guidance and moral knowledge for the community. These séances are for mediums-in-training rather than established mediums except for the once yearly spirit team meeting which the latter conduct. In these meetings, all full-fledged member mediums attend to ask the spirit team for direction for the center for the coming year. (This meeting is written in to the articles of the association, obligating it to hold this meeting each year). Also, in these articles, the spirit team is listed as having specific roles within the association. Members of the center are always specified in the groups articles as living to distinguish them from the incarnated and disincarnated attendees and members of the center.

At all séances, APES has students transcribe the verbal messages received and legibly rewrite any psychography received, since at times the message received is so hastily written the medium can hardly read it. Transcriptions are not taken verbatim but rather only note the concepts discussed. An informant expressed incredulity when I said that my own transcripts had to be word-for-word. All mediums compare the transcriptions of these messages at the next meeting, looking to find within

them common themes and to validate mediumistic experiences.

In this way, students learn whether or not the experiences they have during séances and these meetings are true spirit contacts. APES keeps all these transcriptions and rewritten psychographies on file electronically. Anita believes that this corpus will become a treasure trove for future Spiritist and non-Spiritist researchers. Another member hopes to compare the messages received with other centers to help demonstrate the veracity of information gathered through mediumship. He further said that in the future he hoped controlled tests would be conducted where mediums send messages through the spirits in different countries to demonstrate the viability of mediumship as a way of spirits transmitting information. This would legitimize information received from the spirits and thereby establish mediumship as a true science.

These practical trainings only became part of the mediums' training in the last five years. Several mediums remembered a time when one studied only the literature. Independent study of the literature still, as we have seen, continues throughout the education process. After at least two years of practice, a student begins to take on more responsibility and becomes a member. With membership, the person can lecture at the center and are expected to give presentation on topics of personal interest. They can also choose to assist in any of the séances and are expected to assist in several each month.

Finally, after at least two years at the level of medium-member, a person may run their own training sessions and is eligible to be elected to the executive board. This is the final level of APES's step by step program which takes roughly five years to complete. By this time, a member has proven their commitment to the center and Spiritism.

Sub-Section B: CESAK

In comparison to APES, CESAK students follow a less regimented program of study. Most only attend meetings to listen to the discussions and readings of various Spiritist works. If a person desires a more active role in the center, the founder, Claudia, allows them to begin this immediately. The structure of the center's meetings reflects the informality of the center itself. Upon arriving, one finds

27

chairs arranged in a large circle. Laughter and loud talking dominates the room until all decide to begin the session. Everyone settles down. Mediums of the center pass out battered copies of whichever work they will study that night. Claudia asks where the group left off the week before and, after some confusion, they all find their place. Claudia asks if anyone wants to start the reading from the text and, if not, begins herself.

After every paragraph or question response set in the text, the reader stops. All present discuss the meaning of the passage as it relates to Spiritism as a whole and to the attendees lives . The actual meaning is even more important here since the majority of attendees speak Portuguese, not French, as their mother tongue. Some cannot even read out loud because their French is that weak.

When they want to contribute especially if the issue is one with any degree of complexity, they talk in Portuguese. Someone else then translates what they said for those few who only speak French. Actually, for the francophone members of CESAK, it becomes a point of pride to learn Portuguese. One informant said, "I learned [Portuguese] to be able to read Chico [Xavier]'s works." In this way, CESAK acts as a nexus which enables French and Portuguese Spirtists to exchange thoughts, ideas, and even languages. After discussions, there is the pass. At CESAK though, mediums stand and walk from chair to chair giving the pass to all who want it. There is no separation from those receiving and waiting for the pass, unlike at APES. All this also occurs at CESAK in the same room as the discussions.

CESAK member-mediums generally administer the pass though recent arrivals who identify themselves as mediums can also help. One woman who had attended only three meetings began giving the pass alongside other, more established mediums. After the pass, CESAK offers everyone fluidified water and a snack, usually candy, to reenergize them after having their energy manipulated. The act of having the passe done drains the receiver of (negative) energy, leaving a void to be filled by a snack.

Further, CESAK has historically been a place where future center leaders are trained. Anita and other founding members of APES first attended CESAK. Claudia once remarked that students of hers

had left CESAK to found their own centers in different parts of France. Right now, two of the members of CESAK have established their own joint study session where they and others study a different work than that read at Claudia's meeting. Claudia embraces this saying that she hopes to take a less active role in the future at the center and eventually to allow her students to take it over.

In general, members of CESAK focus less on the scientific aspect of Spiritism. In short, they do not bother themselves with maintaining careful records of each and every séance. Their goal seems more to spread Spiritist ideas and assist the disincarnated in attendance rather than to attempt to prove the disincarnated's existence. However, they do focus a great deal on spirit hospital work, having at least one such séance a week and hold private confidential meetings for struggling, incarnated persons. Once I was rebuked for arriving at the center before the persons there for these meetings could leave without having contacted anyone other than the informant to be interviewed.

CESAK did allow me to attend one spirit hospital séance. Mediums sat around a rectangular table in a low-lit room. White printer paper covered the table's center with two small bins of pens laid atop them. A medium offered an opening prayer to the Spirit Team, asking them to assist the mediums as they completed their task. Then, everyone went silent. Some heads hung downward. After several minutes, one medium began to speak. Immediately, the medium sitting to that mediums left turned to face him, asking basic questions such as, "Who are you?" and, "Why are you here?".

Moments later, a medium to my right began to speak to the medium on my left. A spirit took control over the left-hand medium's body. During this possession, the medium's voice changed. In this exchange the medium described to the spirit where it was and the role of the center. The medium told the spirit that they were in a safe place where they could better themselves if they chose. They invited the spirit to stay, emphasizing that the decision was the spirits alone. Over the course of the séance, several different spirits took over the one medium's body. The other medium asked each spirit the same questions, altering responses as necessary to continue the conversation. For example, instead of asking a stuck spirit why they had committed suicide (since they had not), they asked why they remained on

27

Earth. Sometimes the medium would briefly describe the spirit world, explaining to a spirit that they were, in fact, now dead.

At some point, a medium grabbed a sheet of paper and fiercely scribbled something down, which later was found to be unintelligible. Such spontaneous writings are the basis for psychographies, though in this particular séance it was worthless.

In this séance each of the two possessed mediums were visited by multiple spirits who were either confused why they were there and/or requesting help from the medium in the form of education or advice. A particularly violent spirit entered the medium on my right and raged at the interrogating medium. The spirit identified itself as a suicide and was enraged by its inability to truly end its life. At times, the spirit would lift the medium's hand as if about to strike the other medium. When this behavior began, a third medium stepped behind him and made motions like the pass, probably to remove the negative energies of this spirit from the medium.

After that interaction, the third medium remained behind the possessed medium for the remainder of the séance. Later, I asked another medium about the restraint shown by the medium at this séance. It seemed difficult to believe that a medium could retain control while surrendering control of their body to be possessed by a spirit. During this interview, the medium explained that a medium can retain some degree of control over their motor abilities during a séance. It is as though they feel they are controlling their body from behind it, something like remote control or a driver taking the wheel and driving from the backseat (my analogy).

To remove this spirit, the listening medium demanded, multiple times, that the offending spirit leave. Eventually, the spirit departed; the medium remained in his trance. Spirits continued entering and leaving the medium's body after this incident. Other scenes of sadness and terror occurred though. Spirits were often bewildered by the continuation of their life after death. For Spiritism this amnesia occurs during incarnation and these spirits had completely forgotten that they were spirit before they were incarnated.

Sub-Section C: Conseil Spirite Française

During my final month of fieldwork, the Conseil Spirite Française held Allen Kardec Day, a meeting of several Parisian Spiritist groups. At the meeting, members from each gave presentations on different facets of Spiritism. For example, Anita gave a presentation about Spiritist history while Claudia talked about famous women in Spiritist history. Both reflected their centers well. Anita's flowing PowerPoint ended just as her allotted time did while Claudia's presentation waxed thoughtful at several points, causing it to go almost double the time allotted to her. Other mediums from CESAK and APES also presented as did ASITA members.

ASITA's founder presented her center's approach to education. ASITA's book and workbook takes students through the Spirit Doctrine, consisting of the "corpus sacré", modern mediumship approaches, and helped reinforce certain key points by exercises. ASITA's founder herself has taught children and wrote the book and workbook for twelve to sixteen year-olds to expand Spiritist outreach beyond curious adults. Still her pedagogy focuses on attendee participation and training future leaders, which in ASITA so far consisted solely of adults.

Allen Kardec Day offered an opportunity for different groups to socialize and learn from each other. Some persons who rarely attended any group made the trip to Paris for the day. For example, one couple had driven from Alsace and, by the end of the day, considered making the trip to visit both CESAK and APES's meetings to further their Spiritist understanding. Also, pedagogies were shared which then caused changes at CESAK.

After Allen Kardec Day, CESAK's founder adopted a new instructional and meeting policy. A member from one meeting would read and analyze the section to be studied at the next meeting. Then, they would read their section aloud and offer their interpretation as to its meaning. The new policy was put into place to encourage attendees to become more active in the center and take on leadership roles while Claudia slowly assumes more of a figurehead role with fewer formal duties,

At CESAK's following student meeting, retained its previous format. This seems however more due to some pragmatic concerns than due to any resistance to change. Attendance to the student's group was spotty and the numbers fluctuated greatly from one week to the next. At one time, in addition to the organizing students and myself only two others attended, at another nine. The result is organizers could at times be hard pressed to find a student to take home a reading and return the next week.

In contrast to CESAK, APES' policies remained unchanged after Allen Kardec Day. As Anita, stated, "We want our autonomy." However, she followed up by saying , "I think [a group federating the centers] could work, but it doesn't interest me." Then, finally, she said, "[has] her own project [with APES]," which takes up the majority of her time.

Chapter IV: Analysis

As we can see, education plays a vital role in Brazilian, Parisian Spiritism. Beyond simply differentiating various classes of adherents, it also serves a regulatory function, maintaining a balance of homogeneity and heterogeneity through the teaching of the doctrine. Examples of this function can be found in psychography importation, sect rejection, and disagreements between followers within a group. In this section, we discuss both centers and elucidate the connections between various phenomenon, education, and these regulatory functions.

At APES, the regulatory function differs from level to level with greater autonomy and heterogeneity allowed at higher levels as studies become more independent. During a student's education, APES's educational regime forms students by direction and by example. Mediums direct new members toward literature which identify those books which APES regards as canon and lecture using a Spiritist interpretive framework which new members learn in their studies while becoming mediums. As students advance, they read books further from the core of Kardec's works and the psychographies of Chico Xavier and Divaldo Franco. They then have these earlier readings verified through the personal experience of mediumship which is itself regulated by the aforementioned framework. Finally, students create a synthesis from their readings and personal experiences which they lecture from to new students. By this process, APES can incorporate new material while retaining Aubrée's "sacre corpus". Example cements any traditions found outside of the corpus.

Literature ties all sections of the Spiritist education schema together with interpretation and discussion bolstering the views presented in written works. Therefore, it is logical to introduce a student to the literature to begin their studies. The works initially introduced, Kardec's "Spiritism in Its Simplest Expression" and Ponsardin's "Understanding Spiritism", guide students to the basis of Brazilian-import Spiritism, Kardec himself and the Brazilian psychographers. Without guidance

towards these works, students could study unorthodox psychographies or works tangential to Kardec such as Delanne or Denis which would complicate later learning. However, APES displays these works, like Delanne, alongside the two to which they direct students, allowing students to see the breadth of available literature, a sight buttressed by the lectures which generally cover works aside from Kardec's.

After reading these introductory texts and continuing to attend lectures which offer insights into the interpretations of the texts, students study Kardec's history. Seemingly trifling, the study of Kardec serves as a conduit where Kardec's centrality is reinforced and a historically sensitive understanding of his chef-oeuvre develops. Without the first, Spiritism devolves into an amalgamation of occult texts lacking a homogenous structure which allows for discussion and further study. Without the second, arguments for later additions, like the psychographies, impugn the authority of Kardec by having him appear either incorrect in the case of contradictions with them or incomplete in the case of novel introductions by them. Both would either relegate Kardec to a seminal text only historically useful or the psychographies to heretical attachments disagreeing with Kardec's orthodoxy. The outcome would depend on whether the reader favored Kardec in contradictions and doubted the veracity of additions or favored the psychographies and accepted their additions. However, neither outcome would lead to the enriching blend of both doctrines which Spiritism currently maintains.

To illustrate this claim, I return to the residence of the spirits on the planets. Kardec clearly states spirits reside on our solar system's planets based on a development gradient which ascends as one moves away from the Sun. However, by interpreting Kardec from a historical perspective, a student can readily liken Kardec's "planets" to "spheres", like those of Agrippa, and view it allegorically rather than literally. One also can reinterpret the levels of Kardec by stating they exist on various vibrational levels outside of those currently observable in the electromagnetic wavelengths. Again, this allows for Kardec's comprehension of the Spirits and more recent scientific theories to work together rather than compete. One can easily see why informants shy away from claims that we can currently objectively

prove the existence of spirits but resolutely believe in eventual proof. Spiritism exists alongside, not in opposition to, empiricist sciences, and Spiritist doctrine expands with developments in them. Such a view allows Kardec's faults to be attributed to his ignorance of certain discoveries we now see as self-evident. Or as Anita stresses while talking about studying Kardec's life, "Kardec was a man of his time."

After developing an interpretive framework in which students can resolve contradictions, mediums guide them to begin their studies in earnest with the major texts of the movement: "The Spirits' Book", "The Bible According to Spiritism", and "The Sky and Hell". In these, a student can, as the mediums describe it, learn the framework of Spiritism. Psychographies provide the details which flesh it out. During this period, students also begin assisting in the center through volunteer work which brings them into greater contact with the mediums and each other helping the students to compare their interpretations with those of others. Homogeneity seems to be born here. For example, in my own experience several students engaged in a heated discussion over whether Spiritism was or was not Christian. Anita lectures that Spiritism represents a kind of "primitive Christianity" at least in the sense of Christ-follower, drawing support from the spirits' claim that Jesus Christ represents the highest model of human virtue, and almost all students agree with her interpretation.

However, one student did not, disputing with the others before a literature study session. Using the same quote from "The Spirits' Book", the student argued Christ represents *human* virtue, not godly virtue as is accepted in Christianity. Further, the student said Spiritism is *laïc*, being a science in pursuit of knowledge rather than a religion in pursuit of belief. Never did a medium or student say he was wrong, only that they disagreed. Heterogeneity was accepted even in regards to the base affiliation of the movement, as long as the interpretation used the "corpus sacré" as its source.

If a group or person rejects the centrality of the "corpus sacré", the group is found to be outside range of heterogeneity. For example, one Parisian group uses the "New Spirits' Book" rather than Kardec's original. Every Spiritist which I spoke with accepted the group as Spiritists, but doubted the

50

veracity of their text, usually on methodological grounds. The medium reportedly relied on only messages she received without the traditional vetting process of comparison with others experiences. This stance effectively denies the groups beliefs without ostracizing them. By this process, Spiritists define acceptable levels of heterogeneity.

Education in a Spiritist context does not consist solely of literary interpretation. If it did, the movement would be something more akin to academics. Just as Catholicism is separated from Catholic theology by common activity, Spiritism is too so separated from dispassionate analysis. In the Catholic case, the taking of Communion, by shared action, and prayer, by shared form, bond church members and the denomination together. In Communion, persons take of bread and wine (or grape juice) to symbolize the body and blood of Christ. The bread and wine symbols derive from the church context as well as transubstantiation. Prayers, like the Hail Mary and Our Father, unify persons not only in form but also in substance of the prayer said, reinforcing the beliefs of adherents with shared experience.

Within a Spiritist context, the shared action of the community is the pass and the shared form, the séances. During the pass, adherents all take of both spiritual and physical *fluide*. In my experience nor in my interviews, did a medium ever do, or speak of doing, the pass outside the center. Mediums can direct spiritual fluid only by way of the good spirits which inhabit the center to help guide persons in the community. Therefore, it seems that a medium can only direct the *fluide spirituelle* in the center. Further, the physical fluid, fluidified water, gains its spiritual attributes by being left in the center. So, the context of the center allows for a kind of transubstantiation of the medium, into a tool of the spirits, and the water, into a spiritual fluid. All of this occurs through the explanatory powers of the Spiritist doctrine, causing the pass and the drinking of the fluidified water to reinforce the doctrine with experience.

Séances do the same more potently. While in training, a medium separates the good spirits from the faux savants based on the adherence of those mediums to Kardec's doctrine. This limits doctrinal alterations as only those validating or elaborating on the doctrine can claim to come from the proper

source, the good spirits. However, the doctrine also acts as a form for the content of the séance to fill. If a received message matches that of Kardec, then the medium has received a legitimate message from the good spirits and experienced the phenomenon about which they had heretofore solely read. If the received message contradicts Kardec, the medium has perhaps still received a legitimate message though from a different class of spirit, still buttressing their learning with experience. Shared experience allows the community to stay bonded and keeps the doctrine rather stable by allowing community members to share their experiences during a séance. In APES's case, mediums formally share after they have taken recordings home and transcribed them, comparing and contrasting their findings. These comparisons also harken to Kardec's own practice of comparing multiple mediums' messages to formulate his own written responses laid out in "The Spirits' Book". With these links to the past and to one another's experiences, séances bring the community together and enforce homogeneity.

But, the same links also introduce heterogeneity. As stated, a message matching or elaborating Kardec's stands as legitimate communication. Séances leading to elaboration help the center orient, as well as differentiate, themselves. Here is the final phase of a student, becoming a full-member medium. At this level, one takes part in the annual spirit team meeting. There a séance asks for the direction of the center for the following year. Nothing in Kardec nor even the psychographies offers direction to a center in a given year, so novelty must come during the séance or the center would gain nothing from it. For example, APES might be told (they have not been) by the spirit team to begin a children's program like that of ASITA. Since ASITA's program has no predecessor or even precedent and APES has an awareness limited to a short presentation at Allen Kardec Day, APES's directions would need to be new, introducing diversity into the beliefs of the center. In a less radical example, like adding another study session, new material from the spirits, and therefore new doctrine, would be being incorporated if only on the highest organizational levels.

Because only the highest levels (whether in regular séances or the director's spirit team séance) engage in this creation of heterogeneity, it becomes a prestige symbol. This is not to say that one

conscientiously displays their differences at the higher educational levels, but that one can note a person's degree of learning at APES by the nuances they distinguish in the doctrine. A new student might state that Spiritism is Christian to agree with the face of the doctrine. A more advanced student might argue that Spiritism is at heart a science and laïc by intertextually viewing the spirit of the doctrine alongside the text at face value. A full-member or director might find a nuanced compromise by painting Spiritism as scientific but also concerned with human morality, following in Christ's example and becoming a kind of modern primitive-Christianity. These levels do not invalidate the Spiritist notion that all are equal, but help an outsider understand and negotiate the complexities of Spiritist interpretation of the "corpus sacré".

At CESAK, an informal structure leads to a hazier relationship between education and belief diversity. Generally, center mediums and longer attending adherents maintain more homogenous beliefs than beginning attendees. However, the elevation of an attendee to medium relies not on the adoption of those homogenous beliefs. Further, unlike at APES no direct regulation of beliefs occurs during the center-led training process. At APES, a student learns through lecture and, later, discussion. At CESAK, discussion based learning leads to a rich heterogeneity that eventually gives way to homogeneity.

CESAK's two-tier structure of center mediums and adherents lacks APES's complexity. One must note that the relative simplicity of CESAK's training program allows for this. Discussion groups require a discussion leader and attendees. CESAK, educating solely through discussion groups, needs no finer distinctions. However, it is difficult to ascertain how one becomes a center medium, or a discussion leader. Center mediums who do not lead discussion groups can only be identified through their giving of the pass and participation in séances. During my stay, only a single person changed statuses from attendee to giving the pass, though this occurred after only her second visit.

Claudia, CESAK's founder and principal discussion leader, simply asked if the attendee was a medium. Upon confirmation, the attendee began giving the pass at each discussion. But, the attendee

still professed quite different beliefs, working from what seemed to be a broader, "New-Age" paradigm rather than that of Kardec's Spiritists. On the other hand, the person in question did not, to my knowledge, take part in the séances or personal assistance meetings like what have been previously identified as center mediums. Perhaps, CESAK restricts attendance to those events to those who have developed the requisite framework (i.e. the proper degree of homogeneity).

Attainment of that framework seems to be a personal affair, lightly guided by center consensus at discussion groups. At discussion groups, the discussion leaders rarely, if ever, intervene to correct an attendee's interpretation. After an attendee voices a particularly dubious interpretation, Claudia will give her own interpretation of the reading, usually digressing into a mini-lecture. She acknowledges these, writing them off as her talking too much. However, these mini-lectures constitute the only leadership based input into the educational process. The rest consists of consensus-led homogeneity where the attendees, while discussing a topic, come to a conclusion through their discussion. In my experience, these happen rarely, leading to a mild, influencing guidance on personal study rather than dominating it as at APES where lectures form the backbone of the process.

Because CESAK slowly draws students into a consensus-driven, homogenous framework, I hypothesize that homogeneity acts as a distinguishing characteristic of rank much like heterogeneity at APES. For example, one French member of CESAK learned Portugese to read psychographies like those of Chico Xavier. A few of the center mediums mentioned this much like a badge of honor. Being able to read the psychographies allows a person to refer to a set description of the spirit plane rather than relying on the ambiguous accounts in Kardec and personal interpretation. APES solves this through the lectures which frequently cover the psychographies. CESAK also incorporates the writings though through a far more informal system of prestige.

Chapter V: Conclusion

Looking forward, Spiritism remains an understudied movement in France. First, no accounting of all groups in Paris and their differences has been completed. This work only looks at two of the centers currently in existence, ignoring at least one other with which they have regular contact. Another group following the "New Spirits' Book" also meets once monthly in Paris. This does not even mention the plethora of smaller groups of persons who may only meet once a month for séances only. None of these persons have, to the author's knowledge, been consulted in any work examining Spiritism.

Second, work needs to be done to examine the paths which bring Spiritists to the movement. A common theme exists where either suddenly awakened mediumnistic ability or the gift of "The Spirits' Book" brings a person to a group. At least, this is how French persons lacking prior experience with the movement arrive. For others, their families are Spiritists and the adherent was raised Spiritist. Whether one was raised Spiritist or not also seems to affect their approach to the educational process and their views. Further, there seemed to be a trend of telecommunications workers and scientists entering into Spiritism, and it remains to be seen if their career predisposes them to Spiritism by way of yet unknown variables or if trade between France, Portugal, and Brazil happens to lead these experts to travel more than other fields.

Also, a thorough examination of Spiritists' conceptions of science needs to be done. There exists a degree of ambiguity in French-English translation where *science* means, more so in Kardec's time, a way of knowing as opposed to the rationalistic, empiricist methods-driven science that an English speaker often imagines. However, this difference only exists for some adherents while others seem to maintain the vision of a future where séances will be tested for accuracy and Spiritists claims might be borne out. This divide existed after the death of Kardec, though the extent of the divide today is unknown. Even more, those in favor of rationalistic, empiricist science, like INREES, have begun to try and formulate tests to demonstrate the existence of spirits. When asked about testing Spiritist views, an

academic who attended APES expressed a hypothesis that one could prove spirits' existence by looking at magnetism-based healing though they wondered how one would formulate a test of it.

Finally, a look at how Spiritists fit into the larger framework of French esotericists and occultists remains undone. The sole interaction the author saw was a brief questioning of a speaker as to where Kardec fit into the speaker's conception of mediumship. The author of this paper originally intended to study the technologies, like Tarot, that Spiritists used for divination. Upon presenting consent forms explaining the goals of the study, APES and CESAK both reacted quickly with a statement that no such devices were used. Persons only channeled spirits into themselves from the spirit plane. At all times of mediumship and the pass, mediums opened themselves up to something like possession rather than channeling inspirations from the spirit plane which clearly contrasts with the majority of readers seen online and elsewhere in France.

In general, Spiritism in France remains a wide-open field with little truly understood by outsiders, especially academics. Work by Monroe and Sharp in the States as well as several French authors has examined the role of Spiritism in the 19th century. Aubree and Laplantine have even extended out into a look at the modern Brazilian movement in relation to the 19th century French. But none have given a serious look at the contemporary French movement which exists as a French import from Brazil where both movements have been changed by the exchange. This final bit could provide perhaps the most interesting future research, the Brazilian-French culture exchange resulting from Spiritism and the views of persons therein.

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